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SUBJECT: UKRAINE: NATO SEA BREEZE EXERCISE AN "UNQUALIFIED
SUCCESS"

Classified By: Ambassador, reason 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Sea Breeze 2007, the largest ever multinational exercise in the Black Sea, concluded July 22. Over two weeks, exercise participants from 13 NATO PfP member countries enhanced interoperability through peacekeeping operations, search and rescue, and communications training. Despite Communist and Socialist party opposition to legislation authorizing foreign troops to enter Ukraine for Sea Breeze passed in late May, their efforts to disrupt the exercise were unsuccessful. Protesters demonstrated outside of training facilities throughout the two week exercise, but national and local authorities anticipated force protection needs and were prepared to provide support as needed. Six US personnel were injured in an unrelated attack by street hooligans, however, an investigation determined that it was not/not anti-US or anti US Navy.

¶2. (C) Comment: Beyond enjoying some of the obvious economic benefits of hosting the exercise, Odesa's citizens were by and large uninterested in Sea Breeze; protests were unenthusiastic, and efforts to politicize the exercise were ineffective. However, Sea Breeze generated significant positive media attention, including television, radio, and print coverage of the opening ceremony and press conference. Journalists presented accurate information on the multinational nature of the exercise. Some media covered the small scale demonstrations, usually in a balanced fashion. This year's exercise stood in stark contrast to Sea Breeze 2006 due to the President's and Prime Minister's agreement to enact the necessary legislation and support for holding the exercise, to the satisfaction of Ukrainian Defense Minister Hrytsenko, who stressed to the Ambassador and embassy officers on numerous occasions the training value of the exercise and the exercise's importance in supporting his ongoing reform efforts at the Ministry of Defense. By all accounts, Sea Breeze 2007 was an unqualified success. End Summary and Comment.

A Successful Training Exercise

¶3. (SBU) Sea Breeze 2007, the largest multinational exercise in the Black Sea, concluded July 22. Approximately 2,500 soldiers and 23 ships (including the guided missile destroyer USS DONALD COOK) from 13 countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Canada, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine and the United States) participated in the two week program. The exercise, conducted in the spirit of NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, aimed to improve interoperability of military forces. The objectives included training on peace keeping operations, search and rescue, and communications.

¶4. (SBU) Sea Breeze participants completed 197 training tasks on sea, land, and in the air. These included boarding, diving, mine sweeping, ship maneuvers, convoy and urban

operations, check point management, amphibious raids, and air defense. Pilots logged 138 flight hours, with 52 sorties, and supported 152 parachute jumps.

¶15. (SBU) While some ships experienced technical communications problems, commanders noted the success in working in a wide variety of languages. They also lauded the focus on safety and professionalism of officers and crews, and noted the successful accomplishment of objectives. The exercise directors emphasized during the closing ceremony and to the press that Sea Breeze 2007 met its primary aim of enhancing partnership among the participants.

National and Local Support

¶16. (SBU) Unlike Sea Breeze 2006, which generated mass protests in Crimea and was eventually canceled due to US operational requirements off the coast of Lebanon, this year's exercise received notable support from the government and opposition, both nationally and locally. Although the Socialist and Communist parties voted against legislation required to allow foreign troops on to Ukrainian territory, President Yushchenko and his reform-oriented Defense Minister obtained Party of Regions support and Rada authorization on May 29 (as part of a wider settlement to an unrelated political deadlock). Without the contentious and politicized atmosphere engendered by the aftermath of the 2006 Parliamentary elections -- and the subsequent five-month struggle to form a government, Prime Minister Yanukovich noted that Sea Breeze 2007 was necessary to help develop Ukraine's armed forces, help protect the Black Sea region, and fight terrorism.

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¶17. (SBU) At the local level, Odesa Governor Plachkov and Mayor Gurvits were also strong public supporters of Sea Breeze. Both attended the opening ceremony. The Governor's office praised participants for completing the exercise in light of the political situation in the country and extolled the partnerships enhanced by the activity. The Mayor's office, in addition to assisting with force protection concerns, in an overzealous display of commitment to holding a successful exercise, even went so far as to file suit in district court that resulted in a ban on all anti-NATO demonstrations inside the city limits (a ruling ignored by both demonstrators and police).

¶18. (SBU) The Government of Ukraine (GOU) demonstrated serious concern and initiative in providing adequate force protection planning and resources for Sea Breeze. Interagency meetings held in advance of the exercise included high level representatives from the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of the Interior, General Staff, Customs Service, Coast Guard and, State Security Service (SBU). The GOU ensured safe transit for personnel and equipment, met several times with protest organizers to ensure compliance with the law, and assigned 700 police officers to areas of concern. The police presence outnumbered protesters, usually by more than double. Comment: It should be noted that US Embassy's DAO, RAO, and RSO offices pushed the Ukrainian interagency throughout the process to ensure proper force protection measures were in place in time for the exercise. End Comment.

¶19. (C) While the GOU's force protection measures were adequate and helped ensure the exercise was a success, six crew members from the USS DONALD COOK were attacked and injured during liberty leave from the ship. The confrontation occurred in the downtown area after a soccer match and involved 15 to 20 young men (believed to be soccer hooligans) who attacked the US Navy (USN) personnel for no apparent reason. The assailants fled after learning that the victims were USN members. An investigation determined that the incident was more than likely not anti-American or anti-USN and unrelated to the ongoing exercise. During this

time, groups of soccer hooligans were running around central Odesa, conducting random acts of violence. This incident appears to be a case of US personnel who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Protests - Small, Controlled, Negligible Impact

¶10. (SBU) Notwithstanding the energetic declarations by anti-NATO organizers that 100,000 protesters would descend on Odesa to disrupt Sea Breeze, demonstrations never reached more than several hundred people at any given time. Communist Party leader Petro Symonenko, Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine leader Natalia Vitrenko, and Union of Orthodox Citizens of Ukraine leader Valeriy Kaurov joined rallies and grabbed a few headlines, but the usually unenthusiastic crowds dispersed quickly. According to several accounts, demonstrations tended to last less than an hour and protesters started to leave as soon as media coverage ended.

¶11. (SBU) In most cases, protesters simply ignored the local Prymorsky Court ruling that banned demonstrations. Symonenko and NGO leaders expressed concern that the Mayor's suit was unconstitutional and anti-democratic. The Mayor's office noted that the intent was not to ban demonstrations outright, but to control the manner in which they were to be conducted.

In particular, the Mayor opposed the use of tent cities. The court found in the Mayor's favor because protesters had not requested permits, as required by the law.

¶12. (SBU) Protesters, usually in very small numbers, congregated at the Odesa Sea Terminal, on the Potemkin Steps, outside the Odesa Officer's Club, and near the front gate of the Sherokiy Lan training range where the exercise land component was conducted. Their presence required additional force movement planning, and occasional rerouting of personnel or equipment. In addition, a Symonenko-led rally blocked the entrance to the Ukrainian Navy Headquarters, causing planners to reschedule a medical/damage control drill. However, in spite of these minor disruptions, the protesters had an inconsequential effect on Sea Breeze 2007 and the exercise, as described by co-director Captain Chip Walter, was "an unqualified success."

¶13. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:
www.state.gov/p/eur/kiev.
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